

Making Parks More Familiar: Overcoming Image Issues

- Make personal commitment to go outside our comfort zone
- Get to know communities and ask what they want
- Open facilities to non-traditional uses
- Cultural awareness training, hiring practices, active listening, non-verbal communication
- Partner with media, other service providers & internally

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Background notes from discussion sessions:

Nature and nuances of the problem

- Attitude
 - Perception that we love our parks and others should too.
 - Need to get away from stereotypes and make everyone feel welcomed
 - Getting rid of elitist mentality. Don't make people feel unwelcome
 - Need to think more objectively
- New users
 - Demographic changes and emerging groups that have not been traditional users
 - Need to do a better job marketing and promoting to these groups not just rely on the publics finding us
- Facility concerns
 - Parks not built to meet the needs of these new users, different preferences (group size, uses)
 - Who are we designing our facilities for and who is designing the facilities? Planning/design process does not include input from diverse communities. There is a tendency to design and implement programs, services, etc. which we think best serve communities but don't stop to ask communities what it is that they really need
 - There are real and perceived facility issues
 - No sanctions for doing it the way it has always been done, nothing that requires agencies to come to the communities, to engage new community members involved. Don't have times to do the ordinary and extraordinary
 - A lot of facilities not meeting the needs or drawing people (ie. Museums) not drawing diverse groups
- Government agencies
 - Be aware of regulations that perpetuate the problem (i.e. Federal Advisory Committee Act)
 - Institutionalize the expectation that "extraordinary" efforts should be part of how we do business
 - Image of authority – how publics perceive staff in uniform
 - Still a legacy of institutional racism in organizations and bringing in diversity into organizations may bring diverse publics to our parks/forests
 - Need diversity/cultural training in organizations to make employees and publics welcomed

- Create better customer service and welcoming environment so diverse publics feel comfortable in parks

Why problem continues to exist?

- Attitude
 - Missing regulatory/law enforcement piece from this conference. They tend to be the ones who encounter and welcome publics. Move from regulatory approach to a more welcoming approach
 - Large size groups are not always welcome and that can deter diverse groups who tend to recreate in larger groups. Perception that large groups are going to create resource damage
 - Lack of relationship building until there is an urgency to do so. Need to build relationships and have relationship in place before crisis
- Facilities
 - Need to have facilities that can accommodate larger group sizes
 - Bilingual signs tend to be those that tell publics the “DO NOT” Need signs that are more welcoming
- New users
 - How to make connection with Hispanic & Asian markets
- Organizational barriers –
 - It takes a very long time for agencies to make changes in facilities, programs, etc.
 - Lack of consistent commitment. Commitment only seems to exist when funding is available. Commitment has everything to do with attitudes and not as with funding
- Staffing
 - Federal gov’t hiring procedures may sometimes perpetuate problem and limit hiring diverse employees
 - Low turnover in staff may not bring new ideas

Actions

- Making community connections
 - How do you work with nontraditional publics? Use their community networks and make education, awareness connection (Spanish radio, television, community functions)
 - Some of the immigrant publics don’t trust the gov’t. Not used to participating in government meeting.
 - Make delivery more relevant to these communities
 - Know your market – who do we need to serve

- Need to make personal commitment to go outside our comfort zone and work with communities we are not use to working with
- Get away from stereotypes and ask people what they want
- Open up public spaces/lands for community functions that may not be considered traditional so that community members feel comfortable coming to these areas (i.e. Birthdays, bridal showers, weddings, etc.) Meet people's basic needs
- It is OK to say that "I am not the expert" and meet with communities and explore what their needs are.
- Meet with communities on their turf to ask what is it that they want
- Getting the message/word out thru word of mouth, clubs, churches, etc. interpersonal channels
- Need ambassador programs that go out to communities and not wait for them to come to us. Work in local schools, engage kids. Need program at community meetings, make it more personal
- Some people are visual learners, be visual in demonstrations
- Draw from local culture in your programs, outreach, etc. to make relevant to communities
- Need to reach out and work with media including Spanish language media to get our message out
- Engage in Active Listening
- Institutionalize & reward the expectation that "extraordinary" efforts should be part of how we do business
- Offer incentives for community members who attend meetings (food, \$\$)
- Need to train our staff better.
 - Diversity training for our staffs to make visitors feel more welcome
 - Need to train staff about your agency and other agency resources
 - Know when a uniform is appropriate
 - Monitor body language
 - Important that agency staff work with the public, have a personal approach. Publics need to see you as a person not as "government"
 - Agencies need more community outreach staff to work in communities
 - Look at hiring practices to bring in new employees from outside agency to reflect community and to bring in new ideas
 - Look internally at other staff that can help get your information out
- Image problem
 - There are 2 groups, those who don't know us and those who don't like us
 - Not just new ethnic publics but also elderly, youth, etc.
 - Some people don't feel safe in parks
 - Earn respect and trust from communities to help build relationships

- Partnerships
 - Can we look to other places, states with have similar problems, to see what they have learned and how they have overcome some of these issues?
 - Publics don't know or care whether it's a national park, national forest, city park, etc. Need cross agency outreach effort that lays out all of resources. Combine efforts with other agencies
 - Partner with other service providers to give public information about services
 - Partnerships are essential